

A FNORDLANDIAN

SCANDAL
SHEET



A5 50c

ADULTS ONLY!

NOTHING IS ACCIDENTAL. NOT EVEN WHAT YOU SEE.

WHO MANUFACTURES REALITY?

THE **SECRET**
HISTORY OF
COGNITIVE
WARFARE

FROM OPERATION
MINDFUCK TO THE
ATTENTION ECONOMY

READ THE DOSSIER
THEY **NEVER**
WANTED PUBLISHED

YOU THINK
THEREFORE
YOU ARE
PROGRAMMED

THE WORLD IS
AN ILLUSION.
THE SYSTEM
IS REAL.



FNORD

The Factory of "Reality"

by HAGBARD CELINE

PROJECT FNORD
EYES ONLY
TOP SECRET

PROJECT: PERCEPTION CONTROL
STATUS: ONGOING

DENY EVERYTHING

BUREAU OF NARRATIVE CONTROL

MEETING MINUTES: CLASSIFIED

DAILY GAZETTE
THE TRUTH IS
TOO DANGEROUS
TO PRINT!

**AVAILABLE
NOW!**

★ Third Edition, Revised and Expanded ★



This book examines the shift from twentieth-century propaganda, defined as vertical and ideological persuasion, to the twenty-first-century phenomenon of “cognitive warfare,” characterized by the horizontal sabotage of sense-making processes. Through an archaeological reinterpretation of Discordianism and the figure of Kerry Thornley, it demonstrates how the “ontological guerrilla” techniques that emerged in the Californian counterculture of the 1960s have been exploited and industrialized by state and quasi-state actors. The concept of fnord is introduced as an analytical category to describe the markers of subliminal anxiety that regulate the contemporary attention economy. The study concludes by translating this genealogy into six defensive corollaries: prebunking, semiotic friction, content provenance, agnostic vigilance, asymmetric communication, and reflective exits.

1. The architecture of destabilization
2. Cognitive warfare before cognitive warfare
3. Discordianism as a semiotic machine
4. The fnord and the management of attention
5. Kerry Wendell Thornley and biography as a cognitive weapon
6. Law as a cognitive battlefield
7. The prankster and the conspiracy
8. The counterculture as an operating environment
9. Homology, not direction
10. Operational genealogy of chaos
11. Strategic implications: resilience and mitigation
12. Selected bibliography



**La victoire sera pour ceux qui auront su
faire le désordre sans l'aimer.**

Guy Debord, "Thèses sur la révolution culturelle",
Internationale situationniste, no. 1 (June 1958).

CHAPTER 1

THE ARCHI- TECT URE OF DESTAB- ILIZA- TION

How systems are
designed to unmake
meaning, trust,
and reality.

DOSSIER
01-A



EYES OPEN FILE

SUBJECT:
Systemic Destabilization

CLASSIFICATION:
For Your Eyes Only

DISTRIBUTION:
Think. Question. Share.

DATE:
Always.



METHODS OF DESTABILIZATION



Distort information
at the source.



Invert language
& redefine truth.



Divide communities
& weaponize mistrust.



Flood the senses,
fragment attention.

“The most effective
power is the one you
never see coming—
because it builds the
world you think is real.”

—Unknown

CASE STUDY: PROJECT ECHO



A decades-long program to saturate public
discourse with contradiction, turning
citizens against evidence, experts, and
each other.

RESULT: POPULATION STAYS BUSY DOUBTING
SO THEY NEVER THINK TO ACT.



CONFUSE THE MIND. FRACTURE THE WORLD. CONTROL WITHOUT RULE.



In recent years, a structural crisis of meaning has become a routine condition of public life. The sense of a loss of meaning no longer derives—as in earlier eras—from scarcity of information or censorship, but from the opposite condition: informational excess, interpretive saturation, and a proliferation of competing frames that make judgments reversible and evidence perpetually contestable.

The most pressing question, therefore, is no longer the traditional "What is true?"—a question that presupposes a shared and ascertainable reality—but a structural one: what mechanisms make the very possibility of truth unstable? The term cognitive warfare increasingly names a family of practices and doctrines aimed at shaping perception, belief, attention, and decision-making. In contemporary conflict, the human mind becomes simultaneously the primary strategic target and the fundamental tactical instrument.

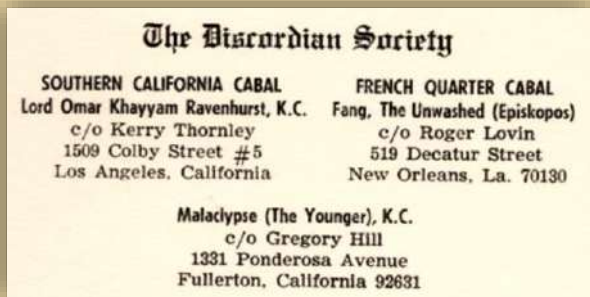
This marks a shift from directive propaganda to environmental destabilization. If much of the twentieth century was dominated by struggles to impose one hegemonic "truth" over another—communism versus capitalism, fascism versus liberal

democracy—early twenty-first-century conflict increasingly operates through a more nihilistic and computational strategy: the erosion of the conditions that make truth possible in the first place. The objective is not to convert the adversary but to saturate cognitive space with contradictions, paradoxes, and noise until decision-making collapses into paralysis or into durable, system-wide cynicism.

This condition closely resembles the ecosystem Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan call “information disorder” in *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policymaking* (2017): an ecosystem in which disinformation (intentional falsehood), misinformation (unintentional falsehood), and malinformation (true information used to harm) converge into a single toxic stream.

The result is not merely that falsehood spreads; it is that the epistemic environment itself becomes hostile to verification, consensus, and accountability. As often happens in the history of ideas and technologies, analysis follows practice. The labels “cognitive warfare” and “hybrid warfare” are recent relative to the techniques they attempt to describe, normalize, and

regulate. Long before these terms entered doctrinal manuals or the curricula of military academies, sophisticated procedures for destabilizing attention and sabotaging epistemic trust already existed—often emerging in liminal, informal, or countercultural environments. Crucially, these procedures treated confusion not as collateral damage but as an operational outcome.



This study proposes an unconventional genealogy of such procedures. It treats Discordianism—a movement that emerged in the United States between the late 1950s and early 1960s—as an embryonic cultural technology oriented toward cognitive interference.

To call Discordianism a precursor is not to posit an intentional origin, nor to suggest a direct or

conspiratorial lineage, as though it were the legitimate progenitor of contemporary cognitive warfare. It is, rather, to identify a technical precedent: an informal, often playful laboratory in which psychological and semiotic levers were tested in miniature and later reappeared, at scale, in modern strategies of influence.

Discordianism is typically reduced to a parody religion, a metaphysical joke, an aesthetic of chaos, or a provocation directed against established order. These descriptions are accurate as far as they go, but they are insufficient. Read through the lens of informational conflict, Discordianism appears as a coherent ensemble of operational practices: institutionalized paradox; ironic authority; strategic ambiguity; minimal yet replicable ritual; and the deliberate production of interpretive overload. Its significance, for the purposes of this inquiry, lies not in any hidden coordination with later institutions, but in its early demonstration that destabilization can be engineered as a repeatable method—one capable of training audiences to cooperate in the manufacture of their own uncertainty.

COGNITIVE WARFARE BEFORE COGNITIVE WARFARE

Before doctrine came practice: propaganda, law, media, and noise.



THE MESSAGE IS CRAFTED.
THE CONTEXT IS ENGINEERED.
THE MIND IS THEATER.



LAW IS NOT NEUTRAL.
IT'S A NARRATIVE IN ROBES.



*"Long before the doctrine,
they knew the battlefield was in the mind."*

— Hagbard Celine

THEN	VS.	NOW
PROPAGANDA ERA (Pre-Doctrine)		COGNITIVE WARFARE (Doctrine-Driven)
One-way broadcast from authority to masses.		Multi-vector operations across networks and nodes.
	VECTOR	
Control the message.		Shape perception, behavior, and decision loops.
	FOCUS	
Centralized messaging and outlets.		Decentralized, algorithmic, and ambient.
	INFRASTRUCTURE	
Public compliance through repetition and fear.		Cognitive capture through friction and flood.
	TARGET	
Truth is declared by institutions.		Truth is filtered, fragmented, and contested.
	LEGITIMACY	
Slow feedback. Delayed impact.		Real-time feedback. Continuous adaptation.
	CYCLE TIME	
Visible mechanisms. Obvious intent.		Hidden intent. Plausible deniability.
	DETECTION	



AIRWAVES WERE THE FEED.
NOW, EVERYTHING IS.

PRE-DOCTRINAL FIELD

- PROPAGANDA BUREAUS**
Early state units shaped opinion and controlled information flows.
- LEGAL THEATER**
Courts legitimized narratives and criminalized dissent.
- PRESS AS WEAPON**
Editors and publishers manufactured consent behind a veil of objectivity.
- PSYOPS ANCESTORS**
Leaflets, rumors, symbols, and spectacle did the work of doctrine.
- RECORD, DON'T TRUST**
Document the signals. Question the channel. Trace the incentives.



CONTROL THE STORY. CONTROL THE WORLD.

QUESTION NARRATIVES



TRACE POWER



PROTECT CLARITY



RESIST CAPTURE

 FILE UNDER:
MIND OPERATIONS

In contemporary strategic discourse, cognitive warfare is often presented as a further domain of conflict: an evolution of psychological operations (PSYOP) and information warfare, driven by the centrality of digital networks and by the tightening interdependence between individual perception, collective decision-making, and kinetic action. That framing is operationally useful for classification and procurement, but it also invites a serious historical myopia. It implies that the phenomenon begins with its recent naming, whereas the record of modern conflict suggests a long continuity of practices aimed not at the enemy’s physical destruction, but at destabilizing the enemy’s capacity for symbolic orientation.

Before it became a codified doctrine, cognitive warfare existed as a widespread, fragmented, and frequently informal repertoire spanning propaganda, religion, law, literature, and entertainment. To understand that continuity—and to avoid mistaking what has merely been renamed for something genuinely new—it is necessary to specify what is meant, operationally, by cognitive. Here the term does not refer to a vague psychological or emotional atmosphere, but to a determinate set of higher functions: attention, belief,

interpretation, and decision-making. Influencing the cognitive domain means targeting one or more of these functions so that they become unreliable, unstable, or externally directed.

In this sense, cognitive warfare is distinct from simple lying. It does not necessarily require falsifying facts and may be more effective when it multiplies truths, saturates the field of possible interpretations, and erodes shared criteria of verification. The paradigm shift becomes clearer when set against the logic of classical propaganda: the crucial difference lies in the mechanism of substitution. Traditional propaganda seeks to replace one belief with another: a false idea with a true one, or the reverse, within a stable moral geometry (“good” versus “evil,” “ours” versus “theirs”). Cognitive warfare aims to sabotage the very mechanism of replacement. It makes it difficult—or strategically costly—to decide which belief is false, which is true, and by what criteria. The goal is not adherence but disorientation; not consensus but durable uncertainty. This shift helps explain why practices that appear playful, artistic, or marginal can acquire retrospective operational value. The twentieth century provides abundant evidence that overt propaganda has

diminishing returns once it is recognized as propaganda. When recipients identify the apparatus, effectiveness collapses. The predictable response is not to abandon influence but to refine it: to migrate from frontal assertion to ambient modulation; from slogans to atmospheres; from doctrinal clarity to interpretive friction.

Dimension	<i>Propaganda</i> (20th century)	<i>Cognitive warfare</i> (21th century)
Objective	Persuasion; adherence to an ideology	Destabilization; decision paralysis
Mechanism	Substitution: false for true, or vice versa	Overload: contradictory signals at once
Truth regime	Binary truth regime	Undecidable truth regime; dissolved criteria
Target role	Passive recipient to be convinced	Active co-producer of chaos (“prosumer”)
Instrument	Censorship; centralized control	Noise; decentralized proliferation
Effect	Forced consent; cultural hegemony	Systemic cynicism; distrust of institutions

Satire, irony, parody, and ambiguity become privileged vehicles precisely because they do not present

themselves as direct persuasion. They circulate as entertainment, critique, or cultural texture, thereby bypassing the subject’s rational defenses.

Within this frame, movements not created for state or military purposes can nonetheless develop procedures highly compatible with cognitive warfare. Discordianism, the central object of this study, belongs to this category, having developed, as early as the 1960s, practices and later theories of “ontological guerrilla” (see Robert Anton Wilson, *The Illuminati Papers* [1980]). Its relevance lies not in any alleged occult design by its founders, but in its capacity to formalize—while concealing those procedures behind a parodic register—a series of practices aimed at destabilizing attention and belief. Before turning to Kerry Wendell Thornley and the post-assassination afterlife of the JFK case, it is useful to restate why the predoctrinal phase matters.

Military and political doctrines are typically rationalizations after the fact. They systematize practices already tested, giving them coherence and institutional legitimacy. One might compare this to doctrines such as nuclear deterrence, which formalized intuitions and behaviors that preceded its articulation; likewise, cognitive warfare doctrine collects and

organizes influence practices that were already operative in advertising, political campaigning, media manipulation, and mass psychology. To speak of the predoctrinal is not to deny contemporary formalization; it is to recognize that the groundwork was laid by diverse actors long before doctrine named it. A central element of this predoctrinal phase is the intuitive recognition that an excess of information can be as paralyzing as its absence. Advanced modernity is not defined primarily by censorship, but by overload. In saturated environments, competition shifts from access to data to the capacity to organize data into stable structures of meaning. Power belongs to those who can stabilize those structures—or destabilize them. “Information chaos” must be understood accordingly: not mere disorder, but structured disorder, a system in which relationships are so numerous and contradictory that reliable synthesis becomes impossible. Cognitive warfare exploits this kind of chaos not to destroy information, but to render it unusable for decision. In this context, producing noise can be more efficient than producing lies. Noise does not require coherence; it requires volume and persistence. Historically, one of the earliest laboratories for these insights is mass

culture. Advertisers learned quickly that emotional association and irony can outperform rational argument. The message does not have to be true; it has to be memorable. That shift—from topic to signal—anticipates contemporary environments in which the primary aim is to capture snippets of attention rather than persuade through extended chains of reasoning.

Politics evolves in parallel. Electoral campaigns become narrative-construction operations; scandals are neutralized less by denial than by submersion under competing versions. Ambiguity becomes a strategic asset: a sufficiently ambiguous statement can be read differently by different audiences, reducing the cost of open conflict. Ambiguity, far from a communicative defect, becomes a form of adaptive flexibility.

The predoctrinal field also includes law. High-visibility trials do not merely establish facts; they produce symbols. Testimonies, evidence, arguments, and procedures build a public version of reality that circulates beyond the courtroom. In complex and mediatized cases, legal truth (what is provable in court) and historical truth (what happened) often diverge, creating ambiguity that multiple actors can exploit. This dimension will be central in the analysis of the

Thornley case, but it must already be stated here: law functions as a society's cognitive infrastructure.

Finally, cognitive warfare does not operate on passive individuals. It operates on subjects who interpret, react, resist, and, at times, unconsciously collaborate. One of its most insidious properties is its ability to enlist the recipient as a co-producer of the effect.

When an individual shares dubious news "to expose it," they still expand its circulation. When a reader obsessively hunts for the hidden meaning of an ambiguous signal, they amplify the signal's power. The mechanism is self-reinforcing. This is precisely why Discordianism is a privileged case study. Many of its procedures presuppose an active, suspicious reader, eager to grasp a "true meaning" behind a parodic surface. The movement does not merely deceive; it invites mutual deception. That invitation produces a community founded not on shared beliefs, but on a shared practice of destabilization. Before it is a creed, Discordianism functions as informal training in ambiguity.

Returning to doctrine, it is important to note that formalization responds to a need for control: naming practices makes them analyzable, adjustable, and fundable. Yet formalization also risks overlooking

noninstitutional and unintended forms of cognitive influence. A focus limited to official doctrines misses the cultural undergrowth where techniques are tested and refined. The predoctrinal phase is marked by experimentation and by a relative absence of formal responsibility. In that phase, actors were often not held accountable for long-term consequences.

Paradoxically, this creative freedom can increase effectiveness: irony is more powerful when it cannot be traced to an official apparatus; parody is more destabilizing when it is not clearly legible as parody. This leads to a broader consideration: cognitive warfare is not necessarily the product of centralized intent. It can emerge as a side effect of cultural practices aimed at other ends. A movement born to mock order can end up providing tools for those seeking to consolidate order. Recognizing the utility of a technique is not the same as attributing its authorship to a specific actor.

To speak of cognitive warfare before doctrine, then, is to acknowledge that conflicts over meaning precede their theoretical rationalization. It is also to accept that many practices perceived today as emergent threats are rooted in long-term cultural dynamics.

Discordianism, with its systematic use of ambiguity and paradox, offers a privileged window onto this historical phase—not because it constitutes a successful conspiracy, but because it demonstrates a possibility: chaos, once formalized, can become method.

The next chapters test these concepts through the analysis of specific texts, practices, and contexts, treating cognitive warfare not as a recent invention but as a persistent logic that traverses different eras and forms.

Understanding this persistence is the first step toward recognizing its contemporary manifestations and, perhaps, toward elaborating instruments of resistance.

CHAPTER 3

OFFICIAL NONSENSE
EYES ONLY

DISCORDIANISM AS A SEMIOTIC MACHINE

Paradox, irony, and ambiguity as repeatable devices of disruption.

★ ALL SIGNS ARE ARBITRARY.

Therefore,
all rules
are temporary.

THE GOLDEN APPLE TEST

If it's sacred
and absurd,
it's probably
useful.



OPERATION: ERIS

Inject contradiction
wherever certainty
congeals.
Confusion is
a solvent.



MANY PATHS. NO CENTER.

Follow any road.
It was built
to be doubted.



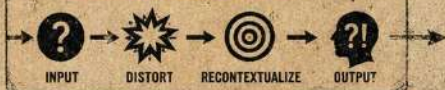
FALSE MAPS REVEAL TRUTH.

The territory
doesn't exist.
That's the point.

“
In a universe of
infinite meanings,
the most dangerous
idea is the one
you didn't mean.”
— Malaclypse the Younger



SEMIOTIC FEEDBACK LOOP



REMEMBER:

Sense is the
tyranny of habit.
Nonsense is the
rebellion of mind.

DOUBT EVERYTHING (INCLUDING THIS)



MEANING IS AN EFFECT. DISRUPTION IS A CHOICE.

PRACTICE BOTH.



Discordianism is often dismissed by superficial critics or conventional historiography as a marginal phenomenon, an oddity of American counterculture, or a religious parody (“joke religion”) with no consequences beyond student humor. That reduction, however, prevents a proper understanding of its operational structure. If we approach Discordianism not as a bundle of theological beliefs but as a repertoire of semiotic procedures, it appears as a machine—not in the sense of a rigid or deterministic apparatus, but as a cybernetic mechanism capable of producing repeatable effects on attention, belief, and interpretation. From this perspective, it becomes relevant to any genealogy of cognitive warfare.

A semiotic machine is not defined by the content it transmits (dogmas, precepts, sacred narratives) but by the transformations it performs on signs and on the subjects who interpret them. In the specific case of

Discordianism, those transformations systematically destabilize any claim to epistemic order. The movement does not propose a coherent alternative cosmology meant to replace the dominant one; rather, it supplies a procedure by which any cosmology can be put into crisis. This point is decisive:

Discordianism does not compete with other systems (religious, political, scientific) on the level of truth; it competes on the level of the conditions that make truth recognizable as such. At the core of this machine lies the institutionalization of paradox. In the Western philosophical and logical tradition, paradox is treated as a problem to be solved, an aporia to be resolved, or a limit of language to be surpassed. In Discordianism, by contrast, paradox is embraced as a stable and desirable form. It ceases to signal a temporary contradiction and becomes the organizing principle of the system. The cognitive effect is precise: the reader cannot escape paradox through a definitive solution, because every attempted solution is immediately reabsorbed by the system as yet another paradox.

This dynamic is intensified by the systematic use of irony. Discordian irony is not merely an attitude or a literary quirk; it is a radical epistemic strategy. Every

FNORD: The Factory of "Reality"

THE PRINCIPIA DISCORDIA

or

HOW THE WEST WAS LOST

DISCORDIANISM ACCORDING TO
MALACLYPSE (THE YOUNGER), H.C.

ande beeing
the Officiale Handebooqe of The
Difcordian Societye
ande
A Beginning Introdyctun
to
The Erisian Misterees

Which is Most Interesting

Written under inspiration by
MALACLYPSE (The Younger), H.C.
Omnibenevolent Polyfather of Virginity-in-gold
and High Priest of
The Heretic Fringe & Protestant Persuasion

ALL HAIL DISCORDIA!

OFFICIAL
DISCORDIAN SOCIETY
HAIL ERIS

utterance within the system may be ironic, and every irony may be serious. Because the level of seriousness of a text or gesture cannot be fixed, the reader is forced

into a condition of permanent interpretive suspension. Multiple hypotheses must be held simultaneously (Is it true? Is it false? Is it a joke? Is it a revelation?), without any stable criterion for prioritizing them. In cognitive terms, this multiplies interpretive load and erodes confidence in one’s own evaluative faculties.

A further structural element is the production of ironic authority. Founding figures (Malaclypse the Younger, Omar Khayyam Ravenhurst), sacred texts (the *Principia Discordia*), revelations, and rituals are presented with the outward signs of religious and bureaucratic authority (stamps, certificates, high-sounding titles) while being deprived of the ontological stability that normally supports such roles. Authority becomes reversible, contestable, and potentially invented. Yet it is precisely this instability that makes it operationally effective: the subject cannot simply reject authority as illegitimate, because refusal and contestation are already anticipated and metabolized by the system as acts of devotion or enlightenment. Ironic authority functions as a cognitive trap—a Batesonian double bind—that neutralizes direct opposition.

To grasp the sophistication of these Discordian techniques, and their contemporary applicability, they

must be situated in a broader trajectory of strategic thought about mind manipulation, where Western cognitive psychology and Soviet cybernetics developed in parallel. In the West, mental manipulation was often delegated to marketing, public relations, commercial persuasion (from Edward Bernays to Vance Packard), or to covert government programs marked by a high degree of improvisation (Sidney Gottlieb). In the Soviet Union, a more rigorous and formal discipline took shape: Reflective Control (Refleksivnoe Upravlenie).

In standard summaries of Lefebvre's theory, reflective control is treated as a process by which one actor supplies an adversary with the premises that make a desired decision appear rational. Unlike brute coercion, reflective control begins by mapping the target's cognitive and moral "filter." The manipulator builds a model of the target's world, then introduces information inputs that, once processed through the target's own ethical system, lead the target to choose a course of action disadvantageous to the target's own interests and advantageous to the opponent. It is, in effect, the art of inducing the enemy to defeat themselves while believing they are acting in their own rational interest. This anticipates later work on

heuristics and cognitive biases (Kahneman, Tversky) by exploiting mental shortcuts to produce systematic error. Reflective control also clarifies why the Soviet methodological tradition matters for this genealogy. The Moscow Methodological Circle around Georgy Shchedrovitsky developed organizational-activity games as techniques for making collective thought reflexive under pressure. In their original pedagogical and managerial form, these games sought to break closed bureaucratic loops by forcing participants to model the assumptions through which they were acting. Once translated into a strategic environment, the same insight can be inverted: if a group’s filters can be made explicit, they can also be fed inputs that redirect its decisions while preserving the appearance of autonomy.

In the twenty-first century, the Atlantic Alliance has largely incorporated these concepts in explicit terms. Documents from Allied Command Transformation (ACT) define cognitive warfare as “the art of using technologies to alter the cognition of human targets.” The battlefield is no longer confined to physical domains (land, sea, air, space) or the digital domain (cyber); it extends to the human domain. The objective

becomes “hacking” the individual: degrading rationality, exploiting neurobiological vulnerabilities, and influencing the decision cycle (the OODA Loop—Observe, Orient, Decide, Act).

The more recent doctrinal vocabulary sharpens rather than cancels that intuition. Contemporary frameworks increasingly describe cognitive operations across biological, psychological, and social layers: the nervous system as substrate, framing and evaluation as psychological interfaces, and institutional trust as the social field in which judgments are stabilized or eroded. Artificial intelligence accelerates this triadic structure by generating adaptive stimuli, testing response patterns, and distributing them at scale. The risk is therefore not only persuasion, but the automation of orienting conditions before deliberation begins.

Comparable emphases appear in Chinese and Russian approaches to the cognitive domain. Chinese military discussions of intelligentized warfare join public opinion, psychological operations, and legal struggle into a single influence architecture; Russian practice, especially in its hybrid and nonlinear forms, tends to weaponize labels, historical frames, and distrust toward open information sources. Both cases confirm that

cognitive warfare is less a discrete message campaign than a method for configuring the interpretive environment in which later messages will be received.

Cognitive warfare concentrates on the orientation phase, contaminating the cultural, historical, and emotional data through which reality is interpreted, so that subsequent decisions are predictably distorted. A striking point of convergence between these doctrines and Discordian practice can be read through the figure of Vladislav Surkov, the Kremlin’s elusive ideologue. In the short story “Without Sky” (2014), published under a pseudonym, Surkov describes “nonlinear warfare” as a conflict of all against all, in which alliances are fluid and objectives opaque.

The strategy is a mature form of chaos management: supporting mutually opposed groups across the political spectrum not to ensure the victory of any faction, but to render the political landscape indecipherable and therefore dependent on a single central arbiter who controls the flows. It resembles the institutionalization of postmodern irony applied to geopolitics: nothing is true, and everything is possible. Where Discordians used chaos to undermine authority and liberate the individual, Surkov appears, in this reading, to use

analogous techniques to make authority indispensable, producing an environment of managed disorientation in which the citizen seeks refuge in the only stability offered by power.

Discordianism, therefore, is not simply a “joke religion.” Structural analysis suggests that it functions as an early example of hyperstition—a term from cybernetic theory indicating a fiction that makes itself real through its circulation. The movement’s founding myth, beginning in 1958 in Whittier, California, presents Greg Hill (Malaclypse the Younger) and Kerry Thornley (Omar Khayyam Ravenhurst) as intuiting that social order is a mental projection (the Aneristic Grid) imposed on the underlying reality of pure Chaos (the Eristic principle). This insight resonates with Claude Shannon’s information theory: information is surprise; it is entropy. Maximum order—a perfectly predictable, repetitive signal—yields zero information. Discordianism celebrates semantic entropy as a method of liberation from rigid cultural patterns (the “Reality Tunnels” later described by Robert Anton Wilson). The “Pentabarf” (the five Discordian commandments) codifies the double bind theorized by Gregory Bateson: a communicative situation in which one receives a

message that negates the possibility of obeying it without contradiction. The fifth commandment—"A Discordian is forbidden to believe what he reads"—becomes a self-negating paradox when applied to the *Principia Discordia* itself. The reader is forced into a metacognitive leap: to understand the text and obey the commandment, he must in some sense transcend it, ceasing to believe in it. From a semiotic standpoint, Discordianism operates through a combination of signs with low semantic density (they denote little or nothing precise) and high pragmatic density (they prompt action or reaction). Slogans, symbols, numbers (especially 23), names, and rituals frequently lack a single determinate meaning, yet they produce powerful effects: tribal belonging, paranoid suspicion, investigative curiosity. The sign does not inform; it activates.

That activation can take different forms, from liberating hilarity to obsessive suspicion, but in every case it shifts attention from the content of the message to the process of reception. The reader no longer asks, "What does this text mean?" but "Why am I reacting this way? Who is really speaking?" A paradigmatic instance of this logic is the concept of the *fnord*,

analyzed in the next chapter. For now it is enough to note that the *fnord* does not communicate specific information about reality; it signals the omnipresent possibility of manipulation. It introduces a meta-awareness that, paradoxically, increases cognitive vulnerability: knowing that one can be manipulated does not confer immunity; it can generate heightened attention that is easily diverted toward false targets.

Finally, the Discordian machine is characterized by high replicability—virality. Its practices require no complex infrastructure, no ecclesiastical hierarchy, and no specialized competence. Anyone can produce a Discordian text, invent a ritual, proclaim a revelation, or excommunicate another Discordian pope.

This accessibility encourages diffusion and amplifies cultural impact. At the same time, the absence of centralized criteria for authenticity makes it impossible to distinguish “true” from “false” Discordianism, reinforcing structural ambiguity. In systems-theoretical terms, Discordianism functions as an open system with high, controlled entropy: it absorbs external elements—ancient myths, scientific theories, historical events, pop culture—and reworks them through remix and distortion without stabilizing a definitive output.

Each input becomes material for further games of meaning. This recursion clarifies its affinity with contemporary cognitive warfare, where narratives feed one another in continuous cycles without converging on a shared synthesis.

A final and often neglected aspect concerns Discordianism's relationship with time. Discordian texts do not simply occupy a linear chronology; they actively play with temporality through deliberate anachronisms, retroactive prophecies (postdictions), and posthumous revelations. By manipulating narrative time, they destabilize the perception of historical linearity and make the distinction between cause and effect problematic. In cognitive conflict, temporal confusion is a strategic resource: if it is unclear what came first, it becomes correspondingly unclear who initiated the chain of events, and attribution of responsibility becomes structurally difficult.

THE FNORD

AND THE MANAGEMENT OF ATTENTION

How invisible forces prime the mind, feed anxiety, and keep you looking the wrong way while the game is being played.



The Invisible Broadcast Never Stops.

From government networks to advertising jabs, the signal is relentless. Your mind is the receiver. Your attention is the current.

Priming is the sending of cues that influence how you interpret and respond to the world—without your awareness.

The fnord is not a thing; it is a function. It is the product of information inserted into the mind not for truth, but for direction.

Through techniques of priming, implication, and repetition, certain ideas are seeded in the mental environment until they take root and grow—posing as spontaneous thoughts, when in fact they were planted long before.

These implants rarely announce themselves. They arrive wrapped in entertainment, news, education, or even outrage. They bypass critical filters by appealing to emotion, identity, and fear.

The result is anxiety—low-grade, constant, often unnamed. It drives people to seek relief through consumption, conformity, or conflict—none of which address the source.

Cognitive warfare does not need lasers or explosions. It works through saturation, distraction, and the strategic management of attention.

He who controls the fnord controls the field of awareness.

PRIMING: THE FIRST STRIKE

A word here. A symbol there.
A story repeated often enough.

SOON, THE IMPLANT FEELS LIKE MEMORY.

WILLIAM BURROUGHS

23 SKIDOO
ERISTIC
ELITE



A certified
fnord operator.
Founder of the
cut-up method.
Champion of
linguistic virus
warfare.



DISCORDIAN INTELLIGENCE FILE

**"ATTENTION
IS NOT MERELY
A NEUTRAL CHANNEL
THROUGH WHICH
INFORMATION
PASSES."**

— Hagbard Celine



Among the many Discordian devices that migrated from countercultural play to wider informational ecosystems, the *fnord* occupies a privileged position. It is not a doctrine, not a slogan, and not even a message in the ordinary sense. It is, rather, a mechanism for producing an effect in the reader, and it does so by intervening at the level where meaning is not yet interpretation but orientation. The *fnord* operates before one decides what to believe. It intervenes in the conditions under which belief becomes psychologically available.

The term gained popular circulation through Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson's *The Illuminatus! Trilogy*, where the *fnord* functions as a covert stimulus embedded in mass media. In the story-world, the word is inserted into newspapers and broadcasts so that readers do not consciously notice it, yet they experience a diffuse physiological response: a micro-shock of anxiety, a flicker of threat perception, a tightening in the stomach. Because the stimulus is not consciously recognized, the emotion lacks an identifiable cause and therefore seeks an object. The subject becomes more suggestible to subsequent framing, more eager for narrative closure, and more inclined to accept

interpretive authorities who promise to explain the unease.

This mechanism also appears in John Carpenter’s film *They Live*, itself inspired by Ray Nelson, who collaborated with Robert Anton Wilson—the better-known anti-ideologue of Discordianism.

Whether or not one accepts the fictional premise, the device is analytically valuable because it isolates a core principle of cognitive warfare: attention is not merely a neutral channel through which information passes; it is an actively managed resource, and it can be manipulated through affective cues that precede conscious evaluation. Much influence does not take the form “believe this proposition,” but “enter this physiological and interpretive posture.”

The posture comes first; propositions attach afterward. In that sense, the fnord is best understood as a technology of priming. Modern cognitive psychology does not require a theory of subliminal manipulation to recognize the phenomenon: cues can alter salience, mood, threat sensitivity, and interpretive expectations without any need for explicit persuasion. Affective arousal narrows attentional bandwidth, accelerates pattern recognition, and increases the appetite for

explanations. Under mild stress, humans become faster at concluding and slower at verifying. One does not need a centralized conspiratorial inserter of fnords to obtain the effect; it can emerge as a systemic byproduct of media environments that reward alarm, novelty, and conflict.

Discordian genius lies in the meta-level: the *fnord* is not only a hypothetical covert stimulus; it is also a conscious symbol for covert stimulation. Once the reader learns the concept, they begin to scan for *fnords* everywhere. The mechanism flips. The hidden word is no longer necessary; the reader supplies it. A culture trained to suspect manipulation will manufacture signs of manipulation, and this can produce a self-reinforcing loop of vigilance, anxiety, and interpretive compulsion. This inversion is crucial for the present study. The fnord is a metacommunicative marker: it does not tell you what to think about an event; it tells you that thinking itself is under contest. It whispers, “You are being managed,” without specifying by whom, how, or to what end. As a result, it activates two impulses at once. First, a defensive impulse: resistance, skepticism, refusal. Second, an investigative impulse: the drive to uncover the hidden agent and the true pattern. In information

conflict, these impulses are not necessarily protective. They can be exploited. A subject who believes they are resisting manipulation may simply be transferring trust from one authority to another, often a less accountable one.

The *fnord* also clarifies the difference between truth and usability. In saturated environments, the decisive question is often not whether a claim is true, but whether the subject has the cognitive bandwidth to evaluate it. The *fnord* targets bandwidth. It consumes attention through low-grade alarm and forces the subject into interpretive labor. When the subject is exhausted, they become vulnerable to “good enough” explanations, identity-based heuristics, and group cues. Cognitive warfare, at scale, is frequently an engineering problem: how to force the adversary’s society into perpetual cognitive expenditure so that it cannot sustain deliberation.

This self-reinforcing loop also helps explain why the infamous 23 Enigma—as William S. Burroughs suggested in “23 Skidoo Eristic Elite”—became one of the few “dogmas,” or, more precisely, catmas (Discordian mock-dogmas), of Discordianism.



Here, Discordianism provides a prototype of a more general technique: the deliberate production of semiotic friction. Semiotic friction is the effort required to stabilize meaning. In a low-friction environment, signals are relatively unambiguous, source credibility is legible, and verification norms are socially shared. In a high-friction environment, every signal generates second-order questions: Is it sincere? Is it ironic? Is it bait? Is it a plant? Is it a false flag? Is it a joke that is also true? The *fnord* is a compressor for these questions. It condenses them into a single affective disturbance that the subject then expands into an interpretive quest.

This structure resembles what Gregory Bateson described as a double bind, but with a contemporary twist. The classic double bind traps the subject between

contradictory demands. The *fnord* traps the subject between contradictory epistemic postures: trust is dangerous, but distrust is exhausting. The more one distrusts, the more one must investigate.

The more one investigates, the more one discovers ambiguous signals. The more ambiguous signals one discovers, the more one distrusts. The loop is energetically expensive and, at scale, socially corrosive. One can now see why the *fnord* is not merely an amusing countercultural motif. It anticipates a central feature of present-day environments: the weaponization of meta-awareness. “Media literacy” and “critical thinking” are necessary virtues, but they are not magic shields. When overactivated, they can be converted into paranoia, and paranoia is a highly productive state for influence operations. It generates engagement, sharing, and recruitment. It produces communities of interpretation that often function like sects: bonded by suspicion, fueled by revelation, sustained by perpetual discovery. The *fnord* teaches the reader to become a hunter of hidden meanings, and hunters are easily guided by decoys.

This is also where the *fnord* intersects with contemporary platform dynamics. Digital systems

reward content that triggers arousal and sustained attention. Alarm, outrage, and fear are efficient attention-capture mechanisms; they keep the user in the feed. In such environments, one does not need a single inserted word. The “*fnord* function” can be implemented by headline structures, notification badges, vague threats, insinuations, and perpetual crisis framing. The reader’s nervous system becomes the battlefield. Attention is harvested, redirected, and monetized, while cognition becomes an afterthought. From the standpoint of cognitive warfare doctrine, the *fnord* can be reframed as a tool for contaminating the “orientation” phase of the decision cycle. The subject does not merely receive information; they orient to it through cultural assumptions, emotional state, and expectations about hostility. If orientation is distorted, decision follows suit.

The *fnord* distorts orientation by making the subject feel that something is wrong before knowing what it is and, once the sensation is installed, by pushing the subject either to hurry toward a resolving narrative or to withdraw into inertia.

Discordian practice adds an additional layer: humor. Humor is not simply relief; it is a delivery system. The

fnord is often introduced as a joke, and jokes lower defenses. They also create in-groups: those who “get it” versus those who do not. This is operationally valuable because it turns cognitive techniques into identity markers. To recognize the *fnord* is to signal membership in a community that prides itself on seeing through illusions. Yet this pride can become a vulnerability. It can produce overconfidence, which is a known driver of epistemic error. The subject becomes less cautious precisely because they believe they are cautious.

There is, finally, an ethical and political ambiguity in the *fnord* that cannot be avoided. In one reading, it is emancipatory: it reminds the subject that manipulation exists and that media signals are not innocent. In another reading, it is corrosive: it trains the subject to perceive manipulation everywhere, including where none exists, thereby dissolving trust indiscriminately. The difference between critical vigilance and indiscriminate suspicion is not merely academic; it has direct consequences for democratic life. Democracies require contestation, but they also require shared procedures for settling disputes. When the *fnord*

function dominates, disputes become unending because the procedures themselves are treated as suspect.

The relevance to this study’s thesis should now be clear. Cognitive warfare is not simply a set of hostile messages; it is a strategy for reshaping the epistemic environment so that hostile messages are no longer necessary. When the subject has internalized the expectation of manipulation, the environment becomes self-poisoning. Discordianism, via the *fnord*, offers an early model of this self-poisoning as a repeatable technique. It does not merely spread a narrative; it spreads a way of relating to narratives.

In the next chapter, this analysis moves from the abstract mechanism to its institutional collision with law and public attribution, focusing on the Thornley case and the way interpretive games can become entangled with judicial procedures.

**EXPOSÉ! THE STRANGEST CONSPIRACY
YOUR GOVERNMENT *WON'T ADMIT!***

Kerry Thornley

and biography as a weapon

Identity is not discovered. It is engineered.

Kerry Thornley understood that identity is unstable. It is written, rewritten, and weaponized. In his work, biography is not a neutral record but a tool—used to provoke, seduce, misdirect, or destroy. A life story, when placed in circulation, becomes part of a larger operation: it shapes how people are perceived and how events are interpreted.

Thornley practiced what he theorized. He moved through countercultural, intelligence, and media circles, often leaving behind multiple versions of himself. The point was not to lie randomly, but to create narrative chaos—so that any attempt to fix his identity would reveal more about the observer than about him.

In a society saturated with information, biography becomes a psychological weapon. It can build a reputation, dismantle a target, or redirect attention away from hidden structures of power.



THE UNPUBLISHED FILES

WHO WAS KERRY THORNEY?

Poet? Operative? Provocateur?
All of the above. His life was a
constellation of myths—some
true enough to be useful.

**CONTROL
THE STORY.
CONTROL
THE TARGET.**

BIOGRAPHY IS PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE

- Create versions.
- Seed the public record.
- Confuse and distract.
- Shape perception.
- Rewrite the past.

**“A biography becomes
a public device when
it helps shape what a
collective can believe.”**

— Kerry Thornley (inspired)

THORNEY IN CONTEXT

From underground magazines to intelligence-adjacent circles, Thornley operated where counterculture and covert operations overlapped. He saw clearly: in the modern world, controlling the narrative is more powerful than controlling the facts.



A biography, when placed in an informationally unstable environment saturated with suspicion, ceases to be a simple chronological account of private events and becomes a public device. It not only recounts what has happened to an individual but also helps shape what a collective can believe. In this sense, Kerry Wendell Thornley (1938–1998) is not a relevant figure in Cold War history because he possesses a definitive hidden truth or serves as a secret agent of an omnipotent occult force, but because his personal trajectory intersects with a series of historical and symbolic nodes where identity, narrative, and cognitive power enter into explosive resonance.

Thornley is significant as a case study in cognitive warfare, not as a secret key to solving the JFK mystery. Addressing his biography requires, above all, a methodological suspension of reductive interpretations. On the one hand, there is the temptation to dismiss him as an eccentric, a mythomaniac, or a chronic provocateur, reducing his experience to psychiatric pathology; on the other hand, there is the temptation to elevate him to the central figure of an all-encompassing conspiracy, transforming him into a super-agent. Both approaches fail because they turn the



biography into a totalizing and reassuring explanation. The approach adopted in this chapter is different: Thornley is considered an “exposed subject,” an individual immersed in an environment of intense informational pressure, who reacts to, internalizes, and sometimes amplifies the forces acting upon him, until he is ultimately consumed by them. His instability of identity was not merely a personal psychological anomaly but reflected a structural condition of his era.

The first element to consider is the sequence of coincidences linking Kerry Wendell Thornley and Lee Harvey Oswald, the man remembered by history as the assassin of John F. Kennedy. In 1959, at the Marine base in El Toro, California, the two met. They discussed Marxism, atheism, literature, and George Orwell; they were not close friends, but intellectual interlocutors in a military environment they perceived as excessively conformist.

Thornley was later transferred to the Atsugi base in Japan, where Oswald had been stationed in previous years, and shortly afterward Oswald publicly and spectacularly defected to the Soviet Union. Thornley remained at Atsugi for a few more months, attending the “Atomic, Biological, and Chemical Warfare Defense School,” after which he immediately returned to civilian life, moved from California to New Orleans, and inexplicably decided to write a novel about Oswald: *The Idle Warriors* (1962), the only book about Kennedy’s alleged assassin reportedly written—but not published before November 1963.

In the spring of 1963, Oswald, too, moved from Texas to New Orleans for equally obscure reasons, abruptly

leaving the city in September of the same year before reappearing in Dallas, where official investigations identified him as Kennedy's assassin, on November 22, 1963.

This "empathic" narrative became dangerous and suspect after November 22, 1963, when history would demand either a monstrous Oswald (the communist "lone wolf") or a scapegoat Oswald (the "patsy"), but never a human and ordinary Oswald. After Kennedy's assassination, Oswald's name immediately became a global symbolic catalyst. Everything associated with it was charged with an extra layer of paranoid meaning. Thornley, who had already developed an ironic and paradoxical writing style through Discordianism, found himself thrust into an informational theater he could not control. His presence with Oswald in New Orleans in 1963, the pivotal year, remained a coincidence that fueled speculation. Questioned by the Warren Commission, Thornley gave testimony that appeared ambiguous—perhaps reticent, perhaps simply confused. However, the investigation by New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison (1967–1969) appears to have damaged his psychological stability and public standing.

Garrison theorized that Thornley was the infamous "Second Oswald," a biological double used by intelligence agencies to create false incriminating leads and confuse witnesses before the attack. Garrison used the immense power of the grand jury not only to seek legal truth but also to construct a narrative.

Under the pressure of the inquiry, pursued by Garrison's investigators and identified as an accomplice in a "regicide," Thornley appears to have suffered a psychological breakdown. He began to rewrite his memory to adapt to the accusations or to escape them through delirium. As a "casual friend," he started to "remember" participating in conspiratorial meetings with sinister intelligence figures, such as E. Howard Hunt, whom he called "Gary Kirstein." Thornley went from being an author of Operation Mindfuck (the active subject of the prank) to being a victim of a real and terrifying Mindfuck. His later writings articulated a series of paranoid claims: he believed he was the result of MK-ULTRA mind control experiments, that he had Nazi origins, and that he had been programmed. His story demonstrates how external pressure, combined with an information environment saturated with suspicion, can lead a person to "hack" his biography,

rewriting his past to make sense of present trauma, however delusional that sense-making may be.

New Orleans, in this context, plays a crucial role. The city is not just a geographical backdrop but a specific cognitive environment: an opaque crossroads of corrupt local politics, federal intelligence, militant anti-Castro activism, New Orleans voodoo practices, organized crime, sensationalist media, and a politicized judicial system. The Garrison investigation makes this environment even more unstable, multiplying competing narratives about the assassination. Here, the distinction between witness, suspect, and narrator becomes porous. Thornley moves within this porosity, sometimes as an ironic observer, sometimes as an object of inquisitorial scrutiny.

A central aspect of Thornley's public biography concerns the relationship between identity and visual representation. Controversies over photographs, physical similarities, and eyewitness testimony illustrate how identity can be treated as a manipulable surface. When Thornley's legal defense, seeking to exonerate him from the accusation of being the "Second Oswald," acknowledges the technical possibility that images can be retouched or that similarities can be constructed, it

does not simply introduce a legal argument in his favor; it introduces an element of cognitive destabilization into public discourse. If the photographic image is no longer proof of reality but a potential artificial construction, then identity itself becomes negotiable. This marks a point of no return in the public perception of the JFK case.

Thornley participates in this process in an ambivalent and tragic way. On the one hand, he seeks protection and legitimacy through institutional and legal channels, including civil rights organizations (as discussed in the following chapters). On the other hand, he continues to produce writings and statements that maintain an ironic, provocative, and discordant tone. This constant oscillation between the demand for seriousness ("I am innocent, help me") and the persistence of parody ("everything is a game; nothing is true") generates cognitive dissonance that fuels suspicion toward him. The public and investigators, unable to determine whether Thornley is "joking" or "confessing" in code, tend to fill the interpretive gap with the worst possible conjectures.

From a cognitive perspective, Thornley becomes, despite himself, a living example of fnord: a human

figure who constantly signals the possibility of manipulation and secrecy, without ever allowing the source or nature of that manipulation to be identified. His biography does not offer a linear or coherent narrative, but rather a series of contradictory fragments that resist rational synthesis. In this sense, Thornley embodies Discordian logic in the real world, demonstrating how a device born from intellectual play can produce devastating effects when it comes into contact with rigid institutions that demand clarity and linearity while often failing to provide them.

The Garrison investigation, with its political ambitions and media pressures, further amplifies this dynamic of "cognitive *lawfare*." Each witness becomes a narrative knot; any inconsistency in memory is interpreted as evidence of malicious concealment. In such a climate, the distinction between human error, intentional lying, and parody loses practical relevance. What matters is the ability of an element to generate new leads, new suspects, and new versions that keep attention and conflict alive. Thornley, with his prolific writing and ambiguous past, provides ideal material for this kind of narrative proliferation.

This is where the operational biography diverges from the traditional biography. The goal is not to establish a definitive truth about what Thornley did minute by minute in 1963 (perhaps an impossible task), but to understand how his figure is used, reinterpreted, written, and transformed by different actors. Journalists, lawyers, investigators, conspiracy theorists, and polemicists all contribute to constructing a “public Thornley” that never fully aligns with the actual private individual. This gap between person and character is one of the privileged spaces of cognitive warfare: it is there that manipulation takes hold.

The reference to Surkov allows us to interpret this dynamic more broadly. The proliferation of versions about Thornley (CIA agent, Nazi, victim, madman, prophet) does not seek to establish a stable alternative truth; rather, it aims to make every possible truth unstable. Thornley becomes an example of how narrative chaos can be managed not by eliminating it, but by allowing it to proliferate until the space is saturated. The subject at the center of the chaos gradually loses the ability to intervene decisively in his own representation. Any attempt by Thornley to clarify

risks being seen as further misdirection or another move in the “game.”

Kerry Thornley’s biography therefore offers a privileged lens to understand the concrete functioning of cognitive warfare devices. It shows how ambiguity, once it leaves the realm of intellectual play, can produce real consequences, damaging individual lives and poisoning collective memory. Thornley is not the architect of this process, but its sacrificial victim and the most obvious site of manifestation. His personal tragedy demonstrates that ideas have consequences, and that ideas designed to destabilize reality can end up destabilizing those who conceived them.

**EXPOSÉ! THE STRANGEST CONSPIRACY
YOUR GOVERNMENT WON'T ADMIT!**

Law as a cognitive battlefield

Courts judge acts. Power writes meaning.

Law does more than resolve disputes. It constructs reality. Through legal proceedings, the state defines what happened, who is responsible, and what the public is allowed to believe.

When high-stakes events occur—assassinations, scandals, covert operations—the courtroom becomes a theater of competing narratives. Evidence is filtered. Witnesses are managed. The goal is not only to reach a verdict, but to stabilize a story that serves those in power.

The Warren Commission's investigation into the assassination of President John F. Kennedy is a classic example of legal truth imposed as historical truth. Its conclusion—no conspiracy—was not simply a finding. It was a national narrative, enforced by the authority of law.

Jim Garrison refused to accept that narrative. As District Attorney of Orleans Parish, he used the legal system to challenge the official story, arguing that there was sufficient evidence to warrant a trial.



Jim Garrison during his investigation into the Kennedy assassination, New Orleans, 1967.

THE WARREN COMMISSION NARRATIVE

- Lone gunman
- No conspiracy
- Limited scope
- Managed witnesses
- Controlled leaks
- Final report = national closure

**A VERDICT CAN
CLOSE A CASE.
BUT IT CAN ALSO
CLOSE MINDS.**

**“Law functions
as a society's
cognitive
infrastructure.”**
—Harvard Celene

LEGAL TRUTH vs. HISTORICAL TRUTH

LEGAL TRUTH

- Determined in court
- Based on rules of evidence
- Requires proof “beyond a reasonable doubt”
- Can be shaped by procedure, jurisdiction, and politics
- Final and binding

HISTORICAL TRUTH

- Emerges over time
- Based on wider evidence and context
- Allows for revision and new findings
- Not limited by courtroom constraints
- Always provisional, always expanding

GARRISON: ‘THERE WAS A CONSPIRACY’

Grand Jury Returns Indictment

District Attorney Jim Garrison brings charges against Clay Shaw, alleging involvement in a conspiracy to assassinate President Kennedy.

—March 1969

THE COURTROOM IS NOT JUST A PLACE OF LAW—IT IS A PLACE OF STORY.



WITNESSES ARE FILTERS

What they say—and what they are allowed to say—becomes the public record.

EVIDENCE IS CURATED

What enters the record is shaped by power.



VERDICTS BECOME MEMORY

The legal conclusion hardens into collective belief—until someone dares to reopen it.





Law is often regarded, both in ordinary understanding and in some strands of liberal political theory, as a system of rules designed to resolve conflicts and limit the arbitrariness of power. In this idealized view, the judicial process is seen as a rational and impartial procedure for establishing facts, assigning responsibility, and restoring a violated order. While this representation contains essential normative elements, it is dramatically insufficient when we observe law in its systemic role within societies characterized by extensive media coverage and intense information conflict. In these conditions, law is not only a system of norms; it is

also a device for producing public reality—a kind of ontological machine.

To speak of a "cognitive battlefield" is to recognize that the process not only produces a legal decision (a judgment, verdict, or other legal outcome) but also generates narratives, beliefs, suspicions, and expectations that spread far beyond the courtroom, permeating society. In many cases, the cognitive outcome of the proceedings—what the public believes happened, whom they believe is guilty, and which version they perceive as plausible—is strategically more relevant than the strictly legal outcome. The law, in this sense, functions as a powerful machine of legitimization and delegitimization: it gives form, weight, and solemnity to certain versions of the facts, while marginalizing others by making them "inadmissible," "unproven," or "irrelevant."

The concept of lawfare, originally coined to describe the instrumental use of law as a weapon in military conflicts, must be expanded here. It involves not only using law to strike at an enemy but also employing the legal arena to disorient the observer. The goal is not simply to "win in court" but to win in the domain of perception. In New Orleans, during the Garrison

investigation, this mechanism became apparent. The legal field was not separate from the world of espionage and clandestine politics; it was an operational extension of it. Figures such as Guy Banister—a former FBI agent, private investigator, and key hub of the anti-Castro network—operated in offices where the distinction between legal activity, private investigation, and covert operation was purely nominal.

In this context, lawyers holding security clearances (“cleared attorneys”) acted as cognitive firewalls. Their role was not only to defend the client from accusation but also to manage the flow of information so that depositions did not compromise ongoing operations or reveal hidden institutional structures. Here, the law functions as a sanitizing filter: it transforms the ambiguous and illegal chaos of intelligence operations into a clean, acceptable, bureaucratic procedural narrative. Or, as in the specific case of Jim Garrison’s strategy, it does the opposite: it amplifies the chaos, introduces elements of legal surrealism, and forces the media system to discuss hypotheses that would otherwise have remained confined to fantasy literature. The “proof theater” thus becomes the space where the crisis of truth is enacted. In this theater, procedure does

not serve to close the discourse by demonstrating how things happened, but to open it indefinitely. Every document presented, every witness called, and every motion filed becomes a pretext for a new narrative. The trial of Clay Shaw, along with the collateral investigations into figures such as Kerry Thornley, shows how the courtroom can be transformed into a sounding board for destabilization. The criminal procedure, with its rhythms, pauses, and arcane rules, provides the ideal dramaturgy to keep the audience in a state of suspension and anticipation—necessary conditions for the implantation of systemic doubt.

Of all the tools used in cognitive warfare, the image occupies a particularly prominent place. It enjoys an immediate, visceral credibility, often surpassing that of the written text or logical argument. Photography, in particular, has long been perceived through what Barthes called its noeme: the "that-has-been." Precisely because of this aura of technical objectivity, the image becomes the ideal vector for deeper cognitive manipulation. When trust in the image is broken, the destabilizing effect spreads rapidly, affecting the very regime of empirical evidence.

In the whirlwind of the Thornley case, the photographic question emerges as a key juncture. The controversy surrounding the physical resemblance between Kerry Thornley and Lee Harvey Oswald—a similarity that Garrison wanted to exploit to support the thesis of the “double” or the impostor—transformed photography from a tool of identification into a generator of ambiguity. At this crucial moment, the lawyer Arnold Levine enters the scene.

Levine was not an ordinary public defender; he was a prominent criminal lawyer in Tampa, known for his aggressiveness, oratorical skill, and a professional philosophy that bordered on tactical nihilism. A later memorial recollection by Steve Hanlon describes him in terms directly relevant to the logic of defense by destabilization: “Given his choice between order and chaos, he would invariably choose chaos every time.” The remark should be treated as a posthumous testimonial memory rather than as a contemporaneous legal source, but it captures a forensic posture visible in the Thornley context. Levine realized that to defend Thornley from accusations based on nebulous similarities and conspiracy theories, it was not enough

to deny the facts; the premises of visual identification had to be undermined.

Levine executed an ontological counter-guerrilla tactic in the courtroom. Confronted with photographs that could link his client to Oswald or to compromising situations, Levine did not simply state, "That is not my client." Instead, he took a more radical approach: he challenged the technical reliability of the photographic medium itself. In both the press and legal proceedings, he acknowledged and argued the technical possibility of photographic manipulation, retouching, and superimposition.

From a strictly legal perspective, such an admission was a standard defensive strategy to undermine evidence by introducing "reasonable doubt." However, from a cognitive and cultural standpoint, the effect was profound. Levine's admission was not limited to a single grainy photo; it called into question the entire category of visual evidence. If a photograph can be retouched without detection, then no photograph is definitively reliable. The technical exception becomes the epistemological rule.

In this "proof theater," Levine and the prosecution engaged in a dangerous performance. Legal "truth"

shifted from factual reconstruction to rhetorical display. Strategically, Levine's defense contributed to a general atmosphere of uncertainty: if photos can be faked, if similarities can be artificially created, then nothing can be proven. Readers of trial reports were conditioned, perhaps unconsciously, to doubt their own eyes. Technical defense became a vehicle for epistemological nihilism, anticipating by decades the contemporary challenges posed by deepfakes and digital image synthesis. Levine showed that advanced technology is not required to destabilize reality; all that is needed is rhetoric capable of casting doubt on the nature of representation.

If Arnold Levine exemplified the tactical use of chaos, Reber Boulton represents a more subtle and paradoxical form of cognitive warfare: using morality and institutional legitimacy as a shield. In the landscape of information conflict, few institutions possess symbolic strength and moral capital equal to that of civil rights organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Their authority, built over decades of fighting segregation, censorship, and abuse of power, gives them an aura of untouchability.

When Kerry Thornley, overwhelmed by the pressure of the Garrison inquiry and fearful of being framed, turns to Reber Boulton, he is not merely seeking a competent lawyer; he is seeking to rehabilitate his image. Boulton was no ordinary attorney: he was an associate of the ACLU, deeply involved in the civil rights movement in the South, and an advocate for antiwar activists and members of the counterculture. He collaborated with the underground newspaper *The Great Speckled Bird* of Atlanta. His reputation was synonymous with idealism, resistance to government oppression, and constitutional integrity.

Boulton's involvement in the case immediately shifts the interpretive frame. The narrative is no longer that of a "suspected conspirator" interrogated by a district attorney; it becomes the story of a "persecuted citizen" whose constitutional rights are threatened by abuse of power. The decision to seek an ACLU lawyer signals to the public and the media that the real issue is not Kennedy's assassination, but freedom of speech and association.

Cognitively, this is a masterstroke of repositioning. The ACLU, as an institution, represents procedural neutrality—it defends rights, not actions. However, in

a polarized environment, this neutrality is perceived as substantial protection. If the ACLU defends Thornley, the automatic inference is that Thornley is a victim. The “civil rights shield” functions as a concealment device operating in full view: it protects the subject not by hiding him, but by enveloping him in a flag of civic virtue, making it difficult—if not politically costly—to attack him.

But there is a deeper and more disturbing level. The presence of a “pure” and idealistic lawyer like Boulton is also functional within a hypothesis involving intelligence operations. If one entertains the speculative hypothesis that Thornley had been an asset, conscious or not, of some agency, a civil rights lawyer would have offered an especially effective form of cover. A lawyer who was corrupt or explicitly linked to the apparatus would have been vulnerable and suspicious. A lawyer like Boulton, who firmly believes in the innocence of his client and in the sacredness of the First Amendment, is unassailable. His sincerity becomes the most effective weapon for the defense of secrecy. Boulton acts, perhaps unknowingly, as a moral guarantor for a subject who operates in the heart of ambiguity. This paradox—the civil rights infrastructure used to armor gray-area

figures—is one of the most sophisticated lessons to emerge from the study of this case.

If Levine and Boulton operated on the public stage (the proof theater), there was also an underground level of legal management where the rules were different. Here, we are no longer dealing with interpretive hypotheses but with historical documentation.

Archival research and declassified CIA documents confirm the existence of networks of cleared attorneys at the time. These professionals were not merely external consultants; they were integral to a mechanism connecting the national security state and civil society. Their role was twofold: to provide legal assistance to agency assets facing trouble under ordinary law and to ensure that court proceedings did not reveal classified information.

One concrete documentary element in the institutional network surrounding New Orleans is Lloyd J. Cobb. He was not a peripheral figure: in February 1969, under oath, Cobb described himself as a lawyer and stated that he had become president of the International Trade Mart in March 1962, while Clay Shaw—connected to the Trade Mart since 1946—was its managing director.

Within that organizational perimeter, Cobb was therefore, in a formal sense, Shaw's superior; Shaw was the principal suspect in Garrison's investigation. The intelligence-side connection can now be specified more precisely. A CIA memorandum released in the NARA JFK assassination records identifies Lloyd J. Cobb, born in New Orleans on July 19, 1904, as a senior member of the law firm Cobb and Wright. The memorandum states that Cobb was granted a Provisional Security Approval on June 19, 1967, "to permit contact and assessment of COBB in connection with his use on a Cleared Attorneys' Panel for the Office of General Counsel." It also records that Cobb had been granted a Covert Security Clearance on October 3, 1953, "for use on a private attorneys' panel for the OGC." Cobb should therefore be treated not merely as a structurally relevant Trade Mart figure, but as a New Orleans attorney whose profile intersected directly with CIA legal-security channels. This does not make Cobb a covert operator, nor does it by itself establish operational involvement in the Garrison affair. It does, however, materially strengthen the institutional point: the Trade Mart/Shaw perimeter, elite legal practice, and

OGC clearance procedures overlapped in the same civic space.

The function of such legal intermediaries, where documented, was containment. In their hands, the law became a tool for managing damage. They could invoke privileges, advise on strategies of silence, and coordinate the defenses of different witnesses to prevent contradictions on points vital to national security, all under the protection of professional secrecy that shielded them from external investigation. This covert legal infrastructure acted as a parallel “legal reality generator”: while the public court debated photographic evidence and civil rights, the confidential channel managed the real fault lines.

In summary, the legal ecosystem of New Orleans during the Garrison affair was stratified into three functional levels of cognitive warfare:

1. The level of Tactical Chaos (represented by Arnold Levine), which used the process to undermine the certainty of visual evidence and confuse public opinion.
2. The level of the Moral Shield (represented by Reber Boulton and the ACLU), which used rights rhetoric to protect exposed individuals and delegitimize the accusation as political persecution.

3. The level of Strategic Control (represented by the broader cleared-attorney infrastructure and documentable through Lloyd J. Cobb's connection to OGC attorneys' panels and CIA security-clearance procedures), which operated through legal secrecy, professional privilege, clearance practices, and procedural containment.

These three levels, interacting with each other, transformed a judicial investigation into a labyrinth of mirrors from which historical truth struggled to emerge intact.

CHAPTER 7

THE PRANKSTER AND THE CONSPIRACY

How plausibility, misdirection, and coincidence become weapons.

IT WAS
JUST A JOKE.
OR WAS IT?



CASE STUDY:

OPERATION LAUGHING MIRROR

- Fake leaks seeded online
- Satirical site cited as "proof"
- Real documents buried in noise
- Investigation collapsed
- Public trust eroded

RESULT: NOBODY KNEW
WHAT WAS REAL.



When the prankster
sets the stage,
the truth takes
a back seat.

COINCIDENCE
IS THE PERFECT
ALIBI.



Wrong place.
Right story.
Perfect storm.

DISINFORMATION
DOSSIER
HANDLE WITH DOUBT

RUMOR



Plant a seed.
Let it travel.
Watch it grow.

MISDIRECTION



Lead eyes here
while the truth
moves there.

PATTERN HUNGER



We crave meaning.
They exploit it.
Truth gets blurry.

"The greatest trick
isn't hiding the lie—
it's convincing the world
the truth is the joke."

— Underground Marxists

WARNING SIGNS

- ✗ Too perfect to ignore
- ✗ Anonymous sources only
- ✗ Ridicule used as a shield
- ✗ Facts arrive out of order
- ✗ Everyone "just guessing"
- ✗ Questions called disloyal

QUESTION THE STORY. ★ TRACE THE THREADS. ★ DEFEND REALITY.

An analysis of the vectors through which cognitive warfare manifests cannot be separated from the narrative forms that, intentionally or otherwise, accumulate structural uncertainty within a culture. In that register, Adam Gorightly’s *The Prankster and the Conspiracy: The Story of Kerry Thornley and How He Met Oswald and Inspired the Counterculture* (2003) matters less as an eccentric biography than as a cognitive artifact: a text that models how postfactual plausibility is produced, circulated, and insulated from conclusive falsification. Self-described as the work of a “crackpot historian,” it occupies a calculated threshold between archival citation—sufficient to confer an aura of authority—and unrestrained conjecture—sufficient to keep the interpretive game in motion. The result is a prose mechanism in which verisimilitude displaces truth, and thematic adjacency is quietly promoted to causal linkage.

The heuristic value of *The Prankster and the Conspiracy* lies in its craft of plausibility. Gorightly does not merely present facts; he arranges them into a lattice of suggestions that holds the reader in sustained epistemic suspense, navigating a density of coincidences that seems too patterned to be accidental.

The most consequential case, and the clearest example of a *fnord* implanted in collective memory, is his handling of the alleged connection between Kerry Thornley and E. Howard Hunt, later notorious for Watergate. In memoir fragments written after Thornley's breakdown, Thornley insists that he met Hunt in New Orleans between 1961 and 1963, under the alias "Gary Kirstein," portraying him as a Nazi-obsessed ideologue who pressed the necessity of eliminating John F. Kennedy. In that account, "Kirstein" functions as a handler or instigator, shaping Thornley and perhaps Lee Harvey Oswald within a wider plot.



Gorightly's method here is rhetorically disciplined. He rarely asserts outright that Hunt was "Kirstein"—a restraint that limits legal and historiographical exposure—yet he repeatedly frames the identification as "too significant to dismiss," stacking circumstantial cues (physical resemblance, chronology, ideological consonance) until they congeal, for many readers, into affective certainty. A stricter review of the record yields a more indeterminate picture. Hunt was indisputably a CIA officer and a prolific writer, but the claim of his presence in Dallas or New Orleans on the specific dates invoked by Thornley has remained contested and has been denied or left unsubstantiated by official inquiries, including the Rockefeller Commission and the House Select Committee on Assassinations. The familiar conspiracy iconography of the "Three Tramps," frequently overlaid with images of Hunt and Frank Sturgis, illustrates the point: the evidentiary status may be weak, yet the cognitive effect endures. In Gorightly's narrative economy, factual adjudication is secondary to the successful implantation of suspicion.

More broadly, *The Prankster and the Conspiracy* functions as a trainer in pattern recognition under conditions of noise. It binds together heterogeneous

materials—MK-ULTRA, Oswald, the genesis of the *Principia Discordia*, and the ecology of the hippie counterculture—into a single tapestry of interdependence, where connection is always privileged over coincidence. The book does not resolve the mystery; it curates it, in the museum sense, preserving ambiguity as an exhibit.

Its most effective safeguard is the epistemology of the prankster: if a claim sounds absurd, it can be waved away as discordant humor; if the same humor later appears prescient, it can be reread as leakage or revelation. This interpretive elasticity is a signature of contemporary cognitive warfare, where the boundary between PSYOP and trolling—between threat and performance—is kept deliberately porous to exhaust scrutiny and inhibit judgment.

For that reason, Gorightly’s book is not only “about” Thornley; it replicates and amplifies the destabilization it describes, recruiting the reader into a secondary Operation Mindfuck in which verification becomes less decisive than narrative momentum. By mixing declassified documents with underground ephemera, oral testimony of uneven reliability, and speculative synthesis, it builds a self-contained mythos whose

internal coherence can survive external refutation. Its value for this study is therefore diagnostic: not as a key to Kennedy’s death, but as a case study in the formation of modern conspiracy sensibility—the selective advantage of the more intricate story over the more banal one.

QAnon demonstrates the same structure at platform scale. Robert Guffey’s *Operation Mindfuck: QAnon and the Cult of Donald Trump* (2022) reads the movement as a recombination of pulp mythology, alternate-reality-game logic, Nixon-era political sabotage, and Discordian prankster politics. Its function was not primarily to prove a thesis, but to keep adherents engaged in decoding. Mia Bloom and Sophia Moskalenko’s *Pastels and Pedophiles: Inside the Mind of QAnon* (2021) confirms the social and affective side of that mechanism: conspiracy becomes a community, a moral drama, and a cognitive routine. The Q drop—that is, a cryptic post attributed to Q—is a digitized fnord: a minimal signal with low evidentiary density and high pragmatic charge.

CHAPTER 8

THE COUNTERCULTURE AS AN OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

How bohemia, media experimentation, and subversion become usable terrain.

**PIRATE
RADIO**

FREEDOM ON THE AIR

**COMMUNE
NOT CONSUME**

**IMAGINE
OTHER
SYSTEMS**



TUNE OUT.
DROP IN.
TURN IT
AROUND.

**UNDERGROUND
PRESS**

DON'T ASK PERMISSION

**ZINE
NOT
MAGAZINE**



POWER
TO
THE
PEOPLE

OPEN CITY
voices from below

**SITUATIONIST
TIMES**

DETOURNEMENT
IS OUR WEAPON

RECORD.
COPY.
PASS IT ON.

THE MEDIUM
IS THE MESSAGE.



CASE STUDY: FREE RADIO BERLIN

**FREE
RADIO
BERLIN**
88.4 MHz

In the cracks of regulation, a city found its frequency. For months, pirate stations broadcast news, music, and dissent—turning illegality into a public square. They weren't just on the air. They were in the world.

RESULT: VOICES THAT COULDN'T BE SILENCED, GOT THROUGH.



USABLE TERRAIN IS:

- ★ participatory
- ★ improvised
- ★ replicable
- ★ disruptive
- ★ memorable
- ★ hard to erase

MAKE IT. SHARE IT.
MOVE THROUGH IT.

NOISE AS HABITAT



The streets, the other, the print shop, the kitchen table—all generate signal. All can be used.

ALTERNATIVE CIRCUITS



Bypass the gatekeepers. Build your own channels, loops, and mutual networks.

SIGNALS IN THE MARGINS



What the system calls noise, we call data. Read between. Transmit through.

CULTURE BECOMES INFRASTRUCTURE



Stories, symbols, and spaces of trust build the environment in which change travels.

66

Underground isn't somewhere you go. It's a way of building where you already are. The world hears what we make impossible to ignore.

99

—Unknown Broadcaster

USE THE ENVIRONMENT. ★ SHAPE THE SIGNAL. ★ CHANGE TRAVELS.

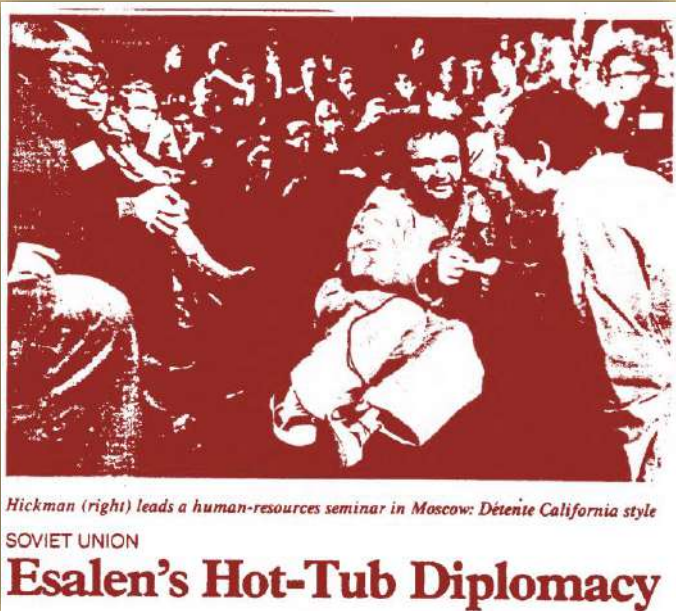


Moving from an individual text to its surrounding milieu yields a thesis crucial to this genealogy: the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s was not merely a liberatory politics, but an operating environment—an open, weakly regulated space in which techniques of surveillance, infiltration, and psychological disruption could be tested, observed, and refined. The documentary record suggests that the counterculture was never an insulated sanctuary; it was a porous field, characterized by identity fluidity, openness to the irrational, and decentralized networks—precisely the features that made it vulnerable to penetration and, at times, useful as a laboratory for social control.

The most explicit evidence of that interpenetration appears in declassified intelligence and law-enforcement programs, notably the CIA's Operation CHAOS and the FBI's COINTELPRO. These were not limited to passive collection. They sought, by design, the disintegration of target groups through suspicion and internal conflict. Operation CHAOS, initiated during the Johnson administration and expanded under Nixon, compiled extensive files on U.S. citizens and domestic groups, under the pretext of identifying foreign influence. COINTELPRO, directed by J. Edgar

Hoover, deployed a repertoire of “dirty tricks”: forged correspondence, anonymous accusations, and the technique later termed bad-jacketing (also called snitch-jacketing), which works by seeding the belief that a loyal member is an informant. The strategic effect is epistemic: it replaces coordination with paranoia, and trust with anticipatory betrayal—an objective closely aligned with the logic of contemporary cognitive warfare.

A key site for reading this ambivalence is the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, an axis of the Human Potential Movement. Celebrated as a cradle of New Age culture, Esalen also intersected, directly and indirectly, with institutional interests in consciousness engineering. Researchers such as John C. Lilly, known for sensory-deprivation work (isolation tanks) and more speculative projects, operated in a landscape where “expansion of consciousness” and behavioral manipulation were difficult to keep neatly apart. In that environment, practices such as encounter groups and intensive therapeutic formats became, simultaneously, instruments of liberation and sources of data on how groups and altered states reshape belief, compliance, and identity.



Esalen was a meeting point of Eastern spirituality, humanistic psychology, psychedelic experimentation, and “hot-tub diplomacy”—that is, a network of informal contacts between American and Soviet milieus used as an unofficial channel during the Cold War (see *Newsweek*, January 10, 1983).

What makes this contact zone more than metaphorical is the existence of documentary traces of institutional

attention toward the “Esalen milieu”: not as proof of hidden direction, but as an indication that this laboratory was observed, archived, and at times used as an infrastructure for exchange and experimentation. Materials in declassified CIA collections around the STARGATE/CREST perimeter suggest that the Esalen milieu was treated as a platform for testing and disseminating techniques for modulating mental states. The Monroe Institute materials, for example, refer to workshops conducted by invitation at Esalen between 1973 and 1975, in which audio procedures and induction protocols were iterated, participants were selected, and feedback was collected for incremental modifications. Here the “expansion of consciousness” acquired an operative, almost engineering-like form: no longer only lived experience, but a replicable format, training, standardization, and measurement of effects, within a continuum where care of the self and governance of perceptual thresholds remain difficult to separate.

In that environment, practices such as encounter groups and intensive therapeutic formats, including Erhard Seminars Training (est) and the Landmark Forum—often discussed in relation to the cultural milieu later dramatized in *Fight Club*—became simultaneously

instruments of liberation and sources of data on how groups and altered states reshape belief, conformity, and identity.

As Fred Turner documents in *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, there is a continuous thread linking this countercultural laboratory to the rise of cybernetics in the Bay Area and, later, to Silicon Valley’s digital ethos. Stewart Brand—moving between communes, art scenes, and research institutions such as the Stanford Research Institute—launched the *Whole Earth Catalog* in 1968 as “access to tools,” fusing communitarian sensibility with Norbert Wiener’s systems thinking. The resulting ideology cast information technologies as intrinsically emancipatory and society as capable of self-organization through horizontal feedback.

That synthesis, however, also furnished a conceptual vocabulary for later regimes of monitoring and modulation. A culture trained to treat systems as steerable and behavior as optimizable is readily compatible with large-scale measurement and control.

Contemporary social platforms, with psychometric targeting and attention-optimizing recommendation systems, can be read as the industrial scaling of dynamics first explored in therapeutic, communal, and

early network settings—including the WELL (the Whole Earth ’Lectronic Link), which Brand helped catalyze. The promise of participation and authenticity becomes, in practice, an interface for extraction and influence.

In this sense, the counterculture was not simply “defeated” or “co-opted”; it was transposed into an operating system for digital life. The idiom of creativity, horizontality, and self-expression persists, while the underlying infrastructure renders users legible, predictable, and economically governable.

Discordianism, born in the same milieu, shares this cybernetic intuition: reality as a construction that can be perturbed by injecting noise, and attention as the primary lever of change. Techniques framed as *ontological guerrilla* tactics anticipate, in miniature, the later playbooks of troll cultures and influence operations, showing how practices designed to “free” cognition can be repurposed to fracture it.

The counterculture therefore deserves to be read less as an external alternative to power than as one of the arenas in which power learned to speak the language of desire, authenticity, and chaos—making cognitive

warfare increasingly difficult to distinguish from pop culture.

HOMOLOGY, NOT DIRECTION

How similar forms emerge without orders, commands, or central control.

SYSTEM A

CORAL COLONY



- No leader.
- No master plan.
- No central brain.
- Yet, complex order emerges.

PATTERN WITHOUT COMMAND



Local actions.
No central signal.
Global pattern.

SIMILARITY IS NOT INSTRUCTION



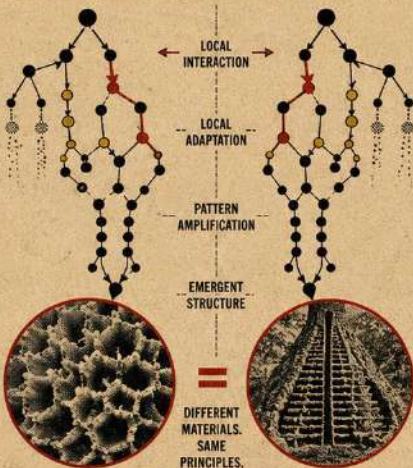
Structures match.
No message was sent.
No plan was shared.

CASE STUDY: ISLAND SHRUBS



Islands thousands of miles apart.
No shared species, no shared history.
Yet the shape of life repeats.

RESULT: ENVIRONMENT + CONSTRAINT = CONVERGENCE



SYSTEM B

TERMITE MOUND



- No architect.
- No blueprint.
- No central controller.
- Yet, complex order emerges.

DISTRIBUTED IMITATION



Observe. Respond.
Adjust. Repeat.
No orders needed.

FORM REPEATS
ACROSS DISTANCE

Separated by oceans.
Similar forms appear.
Same rules, no contact.

“Similarity is not evidence of communication—it is evidence of constraint, pressure, and the search for stable solutions.”

— Unknown —

WHAT THIS REVEALS



Simple rules create rich forms.



Complexity does not require central control.



The world echoes itself.



Patterns persist because they work.

EFFECT:

Parallel emergence across systems, species, and scales.

RECOGNIZE HOMOLOGY. RESIST THE ILLUSION OF DIRECTION.

LOOK FOR STRUCTURE



Seek the shape, not the story.

TEST FOR INDEPENDENCE



≠ Different origins can make the same form.

PRIORITIZE MECHANISM



Understand the rules, not the rulers.

HONOR EMERGENCE



Let go of control. See the whole.

★ NO ORDERS. NO CENTER. ONLY PATTERN. ★

The dense web of connections traced so far can tempt the reader toward a consoling but mistaken inference: the existence of an omnipotent occult director—an “Illuminati” that choreographed Discordianism, the Kennedy afterlife, and the birth of network culture as a single plot. The corrective proposed here is operational homology. Borrowed from evolutionary biology and structuralist sociology, homology names the way distant entities can converge on similar forms and tactics not because one commands the other, but because both adapt to the same informational ecosystem.

Tactical convergence is real. Operation Mindfuck, with forged letters, playful disinformation, and culture jamming, is structurally analogous—at the level of mechanism—to COINTELPRO’s repertoire of anonymous correspondence, falsified documents, and bad-jacketing used against the New Left and the Black Panthers. Both systems manipulate communication channels to raise entropy, to fracture trust, and to disable coordination. Both treat social reality as a fragile construct sustained by shared narratives, therefore vulnerable to targeted interventions at nodes of credibility. But to infer from this similarity that the

CIA “created” Discordianism is a category error. It is more rigorous to see both Discordian practice and state counterintelligence as expressions of a Cold War climate shaped by paranoia, information theory, cybernetics, and the growing conviction that the psyche is manipulable.

Both fields draw—consciously or not—on the same cybernetic matrix, in which control is exercised less through overt coercion than through the management of information, feedback, and decision premises. Soviet Reflective Control, as developed by Vladimir Lefebvre, formalizes this logic: induce the opponent to choose self-defeating actions by supplying inputs that align with the opponent’s own model of the world. As doctrine, it articulates what Discordian Mindfuck intuited as practice. In this light, Thornley appears less as the victim of a single linear conspiracy than as the point of collapse of convergent pressures: legal vectors (the Garrison inquiry), media vectors (tabloids and counterculture channels), and psychological vectors (reported paranoid ideation and, where documented, drug use), each operating with homologous logics while responding to different incentives.



Homology reframes cognitive warfare as an emergent property of advanced modernity, not the private domain of a puppeteer. The cleared-attorney infrastructures that buffered intelligence exposure in New Orleans did not need to coordinate with underground editors or satirical sects; yet, together, their outputs could saturate the environment with

incompatible signals and erode the possibility of stable attribution. To recognize homology is to accept that techniques of control and disruption can become ambient: available to any actor—state, corporation, art collective, or individual—with sufficient semiotic competence to activate them.

This approach also guards against overattributing intention to what is often produced by bureaucratic momentum, competitive media logic, or spontaneous cultural drift. The fact that a technique benefits power does not entail that power invented it; power more often scales and industrializes innovations developed at the margins. Homology therefore shifts the analytical center from “who” to “how”: not who issued the order, but how the machinery that makes order—or disorder—reproducible operates. In a cybernetic environment, rebels and controllers may find themselves using the same tools and inhabiting the same cognitive architecture. Admitting this structural complicity is an uncomfortable prerequisite for any resistance that is not merely a mirror image of what it opposes.

CHAPTER 10

OPERATIONAL GENEALOGY OF CHAOS

Tracing how disorder is inherited, adapted, and redeployed.

PRINCIPLES OF TRANSMISSION



INHERIT THE METHOD

Tactics pass down.



ADAPT THE SIGNAL

Tools change. Patterns persist.



REPEAT THE RUPTURE

Each cycle finds new cracks.



CHAOS HAS A LINEAGE

Trace it. Break it. Refuse it.

THE ORIGIN

THE PRACTICAL JOKER

Disruption as play.
Mock authority.
Test boundaries.

circa unknown



1ST DESCENDANTS

THE STORY TELLERS

Rumor becomes craft.
Whisper networks.
Embellish. Amplify.

circa early press



2ND DESCENDANTS

THE AGITATORS

Disorder for purpose.
Stoke grievance.
Organize confusion.

circa political clubs



3RD GENERATION

THE BROADCASTERS

Mass reach.
Speed over truth.
Volume is power.

circa radio age



4TH GENERATION

THE ENGINEERS

Algorithmic drift.
Engineer outrage.
Hide the hand.

circa digital rise



5TH GENERATION

THE OPERATIVES

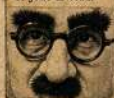
Plausibility as a weapon.
Blend in.
Never traced.

circa now



PRANK

Small act.
Local disruption.
A joke is told.



RUMOR

Story spreads.
Context fades.
Curiosity grows.



PANIC

Fear compounds.
Systems strain.
Trust collapses.



CONTROL

Order is sold.
Compliance rises.
Freedom shrinks.



EYES OPEN FILE

SUBJECT:

Lineage Analysis

CLASSIFICATION:

For Your Eyes Only

DISTRIBUTION:

Think. Question. Share.

DATE:

Always.



“We do not inherit chaos by accident. We inherit it by inattention.”

— Unknown

CASE STUDY: CULT OF THE HAT

A fake fashion trend began as a campus prank. Amplified online, it became a cultural flash. Merch, meetups, and “meaning” followed. When the truth surfaced, defenders doubled down. The joke became identity. Identity became market. Market became control.



ARCHIVE NOTE

This lineage is not fate. It is a map. Read it. Use it. Change it.

FILE 10-CHAOS

KNOW THE LINEAGE. ★ BREAK THE PATTERN. ★ RECLAIM THE FUTURE.



The route traced through Discordianism, the fractured biography of Kerry Thornley, the courtrooms of New Orleans, and the laboratories of the Californian counterculture leads not to a verdict but to a map: an operational genealogy of chaos. Practices born at the margins—often as satire, play, or aesthetic provocation—anticipate and prefigure the dominant modes of contemporary conflict, turning chaos from mere entropy into a strategic resource.

The key shift in this genealogy is the industrialization of the fnord. In the 1960s and 1970s, producing a fnord—a marker of destabilizing ambiguity, a glitch in the matrix of consent—was still artisanal: typewriters, mimeographs, postal networks, and direct human labor, from COINTELPRO forgeries to the surreal provocations of Playboy’s letters page orchestrated by Robert Anton Wilson. In the digital age, the same effect is automated and scaled: botnets, deepfakes, engagement-optimizing recommender systems, and coordinated troll operations generate a continuous stream of cognitive micro-traumas that keep populations in a state of permanent alert and deliberative fatigue. The fnord is no longer hidden

between lines; it is embedded in the interface through which reality is encountered.

Doctrines now gathered under the labels “hybrid warfare” and “nonlinear warfare”—often associated with Russian strategic writing and with figures such as Vladislav Surkov—do not primarily aim, as twentieth-century propaganda did, to secure assent to a single ideology. They aim to saturate the environment with contradictions so persistent that the basic distinctions of public life become unstable: truth and falsehood, friend and enemy, signal and noise.

Chaos functions here as the intended output. Online influence operations replicate *bad-jacketing* at scale: it is no longer necessary to prove corruption, only to circulate doubt so broadly that institutional trust collapses under the weight of suspicion.

Seen from this angle, Thornley is a prototypical casualty of cognitive warfare. His slide into paranoia, his inability to distinguish between the jokes of Operation Mindfuck and the real pressures exerted upon him, and his identity’s fragmentation into mutually incompatible stories (Nazi, CIA asset, MK-ULTRA subject, messiah) prefigure a condition now distributed across the networked public. Thornley lived, in

miniature, what digital users now experience at scale: the erosion of the boundary between fiction and testimony, the sense of invisible manipulation, and the temptation to flee uncertainty by adopting totalizing narratives. Robert Anton Wilson’s notion of Chapel Perilous—a crisis of interpretation in which coincidences seem to force a choice between conspiracy, paranormal causation, and projection—names this psychic impasse. Today, an algorithmic Chapel Perilous is a default environment, in which data-driven suggestion manufactures coincidence and commodifies identity.

The broader conclusion is that social reality is produced rather than simply given. The raw material is the ambiguity and indeterminacy inherent in experience; the machinery includes legal institutions, media systems, intelligence practices, and technological infrastructures; the output is the unstable simulacrum encountered and consumed each day. Discordianism, born as a cosmic laugh at imposed order, revealed the gears early: order can mask engineered chaos, and chaos can be made orderly enough to govern.

To live through twenty-first-century cognitive warfare, the task is not to locate a final, comforting truth

behind appearances. The more urgent discipline is to recognize the factory: to identify fnords as they surface, and to understand the operational logics by which meaning is manufactured and circulated. In conditions resembling those analyzed by Guy Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle*, we require an operational agnosticism that navigates information without being possessed by it—using networked tools without becoming their instrument. If chaos has become a weapon, critical clarity is the only durable defense. Thornley's trajectory is therefore not a historical curiosity; it is an anticipatory warning from a future that is already present.

To withstand twenty-first-century cognitive warfare with some measure of integrity, the priority is therefore not to discover the identity of supposed puppeteers of history, but to know how to distinguish symbol from simulacrum.

The symbol is not a mere sign: it is a threshold that guides beyond itself while preserving the difference between image and referent, between signifier and meaning. For that reason, it can sustain plurality, stratification, even contradiction. In the symbol, ambiguity is generative: it demands interpretive work

and presupposes a “territory”—historical, experiential, spiritual—to which the figure alludes and from which it draws authority. It is the regime of “maps” conscious of their own partiality: they do not deny being constructions; they declare themselves as such, and in that declaration they allow the individual a critical distance that prevents representation from replacing what it represents.

The simulacrum is the inverse: it does not refer; it replaces. It is a copy without an original, like Disneyland—or, more radically, a circuit in which the image does not represent the real but programs and stages it, until the very question of the referent becomes irrelevant.

If the Platonic “shadow theater” deceives because it mistakes projections for things, it nevertheless still allows one to intuit that things exist outside the cave. The theater of *simulacra*, by contrast, is a stage without an outside, where the scene coincides with the totality of available experience and where the shadow no longer conceals an object: it produces the object, governs access to it, and sells its consumption.

This is where cognitive warfare finds its breeding ground: it does not need to persuade; it only needs to

saturate. It does not need to establish foundations; it only needs to replicate. It does not need to demonstrate; it only needs to circulate. To distinguish between symbol and simulacrum, in short, means learning to recognize whether what appears before us asks for interpretation and responsibility, or whether it demands only adherence and repetition. Above all, it means remembering that human freedom begins at the point where the map ceases to be confused with the territory.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

Resilience and mitigation

START HERE.

Strong systems are built before crisis, not during. Design attention defenses now.



FIELD PRINCIPLES



ANTICIPATE
assume adversarial motivations, operations.



VERIFY
trace claims to sources, methods, and context.



DELIBERATE
buy time before commit to turns into actions.



LOCK INTEGRITY
protect provenance, process, and procedures.



KEEP AGENCY
preserve options and communicate with clarity.

“Strategy is not a reaction pattern. It is the protection of the decision environment.”

— Carl von Clausewitz

DOSSIER: HYBRID PRESSURE

- Manipulation
- Psychological Warfare
- Fake Channels
- Proxy Operations
- Exploit Speed

CONFIDENTIAL



STRENGTHEN THE FOUNDATIONS

- ✓ Education & Media Literacy
- ✓ Secure Platforms & Protocols
- ✓ Accountable Institutions
- ✓ Transparent Processes
- ✓ Diverse Information Ecosystem
- ✓ Civic Trust & Solidarity



RESIST REASON REBUILD



OBSERVABLE INDICATORS

- Sudden narrative spikes
- Coordinated account behavior
- Calls for premature outrage
- Decentralization
- Identity impersonation
- Rapid policy pressure

WATCH LIST

A local researcher traced budget allocations through forgotten memos, newspaper archives, and one dusty butler.

RESULT: Broken a story buried for 30 years. Went to the front page.

These measures are defensive disciplines of sovereignty. In a world where cognitive borders supplement a society, remains free only if it can process disorder without becoming its transmitter.

TOOLS OF THE READER



OBSERVE



QUESTION



ANALYZE



ARCHIVE



READ WIDE.
THINK DEEP.
CONNECT THE DOTS.

DON'T JUST CONSUME.
COMBINE. CONNECT. CONTRIBUTE.



EYES OPEN. FILE ACTIVE.

TACTICAL REMINDERS

- ✓ PAUSE BEFORE YOU PASS.
- ✓ TRACE BEFORE YOU TRUST.
- ✓ CONTEXT BEFORE OUTRAGE.
- ✓ PROCESS BEFORE POLICY.
- ✓ EVIDENCE BEFORE ACTION.

ATTENTION IS A DOMAIN.

Protect your information space.

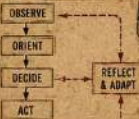
EVIDENCE LAYERS

1. CAPTURE
2. CONTEXT
3. CORROBORATE
4. CERTIFY
5. COMMUNICATE

WARNING

INFORMATION WARFARE DOES NOT NEED TO BE BELIEVED TO BE EFFECTIVE. IT NEEDS TO BE SHARED.

DECISION MAP



WHEN UNCERTAIN,
NARROW THE CLAIM,
NOT THE TRUTH.



If the genealogy is operational, its conclusion cannot be purely diagnostic. The same analysis that identifies the industrialization of the fnord also implies a limited repertoire of defenses. None of them restores a vanished age of consensus; their task is more modest and more demanding: to increase the cost of cognitive attack, preserve the bandwidth of judgment, and keep institutions from feeding the very ambiguity that hostile operators exploit.

1. Prebunking and cognitive inoculation. Citizens and decision-makers should be exposed in advance to the characteristic mechanics of manipulation: trolling, bad-jacketing, lawfare, deepfake laundering, false-flag accusations, and reflective control. Pre-exposure does not eliminate deception; it raises the attacker’s cost by making the method recognizable before emotional arousal fixes the frame.

2. Engineered semiotic friction. Platforms should not be optimized for speed alone. Share prompts, delayed reposting, context panels, friction before forwarding high-arousal material, and limits on manipulative interface designs, including dark patterns, can push the user from reflexive response toward evaluation. The point is not censorship but temporal deceleration: a few

seconds of imposed latency can protect the orientation phase of the OODA loop.

3. Provenance before spectacle. In visual evidence, the burden must shift from intuitive realism to verifiable chain of custody. Cryptographic provenance, watermarking, and Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity (C2PA) metadata are not magical guarantees; they should be treated as evidentiary infrastructure, paired with forensic practice and institutional accountability. Their value lies in making manipulation contestable before the public sphere collapses into the belief that all images are equally suspect.

4. Agnostic vigilance. Media literacy should cultivate vigilance without training paranoia. The operational virtue is the ability to suspend judgment without surrendering to apophenia: to distinguish symbol from simulacrum, evidence from narrative momentum, and uncertainty from proof of conspiracy. This discipline reclaims ambiguity as a condition of inquiry rather than a trigger for panic.

5. Asymmetric public communication. Institutions should refuse the adversary’s preferred frame when that frame is designed to produce polarized mimicry.

Effective public speech narrows the field to material facts, timelines, institutional competencies, and verifiable procedures. It does not repeat every toxic premise in order to deny it; it imposes a vocabulary capable of reducing entropy.

6. Reflective exits. Organizations exposed to hybrid pressure need structured methods for interrupting their own closed loops. Adapted from the logic of organizational-activity games, a reflective exit forces a group to map its assumptions before deciding. Its purpose is not consensus theater, but the recovery of strategic freedom: the ability to see the filters through which one is being induced to act.

These measures are defensive, but they are also disciplines of sovereignty. In a world where territorial borders are supplemented by cognitive borders, a society remains free only if it can process disorder without becoming its transmitter.

READ MORE

A field guide to sources, signals, and deeper traces.

START HERE.

Good reads
build clarity.
Deeper reads
build leverage.



READING TRAILS



TRAIL 1

Power & Control
Map the structures.



TRAIL 2

Narrative & Myth
Decode the stories.



TRAIL 3

Networks & Signals
Follow the flow.



TRAIL 4

Memory & Archives
Preserve the truth.



READING IS RECONNAISSANCE.

Information without
context is noise.
Context without
sources is a rumor.



follow the
footnotes



every signal
has a source



archives
outlast
outrage



read against
the frame

SOURCES
NOT RUMORS

follow the
footnotes

CHARTER OF ON THE PROTECTION OF IGNORANCE

All evidence and
information collected
should be used
in the service
of truth.

Context
over content.
Pattern over
partisan.

Verify everything.
Trust nothing
without proof.



STAY
CRITICAL

CASE STUDY: OPERATION PAPER TRAIL



A local researcher traced
budget allocation through
forgotten memos,
newspaper archives,
and an old dusty
butler.

RESULT: Broken a story
buried for 30 years.
Went to the front page.

“

*The more you read,
the less you'll need
to be told.*

”

— James Baldwin

TOOLS OF THE READER



QUESTION



COMPARE



ANNOTATE



ARCHIVE



DON'T JUST
CONSUME.

COMBINE. CONNECT.
CONTRIBUTE.

READING RULES

- ☒ Question the author.
- ☒ Check the provenance.
- ☒ Compare the accounts.
- ☒ Follow the money.
- ☒ Trace the silences.
- ☒ Keep receipts.



READ WIDE. THINK DEEP.



CONNECT THE DOTS.



BUILD THE MAP.



EYES OPEN. FILE ACTIVE.

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